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FM AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2425  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
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UNCLAS BRATISLAVA 000163

SIPDIS

FOR DRL/AE DAN NADEL, EUR/CE ERTAS AND LA MORE, PLEASE PASS  
TO ERIKA SCHLAGER AT HELSINKI COMMISSION

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL ROMA DAY MARRED BY TORTURE SCANDAL

REF: STATE 20359

11. (U) SUMMARY: International Roma Day 2009 began with Slovakia's own version of Abu Ghraib, as the leading daily SME broke the story of six Roma minors who were forced to strip and beat each other while in police custody in the eastern Slovak city of Kosice. This put an extremely somber tone to the otherwise celebratory cultural events sponsored by the government and civil society, and overshadowed our own message regarding the corrosive effects of societal segregation. The Roma Plenipotentiary, the Minister of Interior, and Slovakia's Chief of Police all condemned the incident, which we will continued to monitor closely. End summary.

12. (U) On March 21, six minors, ostensibly from the infamous Kosice Roma ghetto Lunik IX, were detained by police after allegedly mugging an elderly woman outside a store. Once in police custody, as video footage on SME's website graphically portrays, the six boys were forced to beat each other while a dog barks at them and the police laugh. In subsequent footage, the boys are forced to remove all of their clothes and endure the catcalls of the police.

13. (U) Chief of Police Pavol Packa flew to Kosice immediately after the story broke the morning of April 8, and pledged to fire all of the responsible policemen. Interior Minister Robert Kalinak told the press that he would not resign over the incident, which he viewed as the isolated acts of a few individuals rather than a systematic failure of the police. Kalinak said "it is not acceptable that the police punish street pickpockets and robbers. We have courts for this." Kalinak also instructed the Ministry to begin criminal prosecution for misuse of public office and blackmail. Kalinak said that, thus far, nine policemen have been suspended and seven will be fired for violating the police oath.

14. (U) Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Affairs Anna Botosova told PolOff that she had spoken to both Packa and Kalinak, and was satisfied with their responses, although of course she condemned the egregious human rights abuse the case represents. She also issued a public statement pledging to monitor the investigation of the torture case.

15. (U) Former Slovak Ambassador to the United States Martin Butora called the horrendous incident Slovakia's own "Abu Ghraib." He praised the investigative journalism of SME, and said that the careful way in which the paper broke the story helped encourage prompt government action. Butora also told the Charge that by 5:00 a.m. on April 8 there were over one thousand comments posted on the SME website about the video. Because so many of them were racist, Sme's site monitors could not keep up, and were thus forced to erase all existing comments and shut down the comment option to avoid

broadcasting more offensive material.

¶6. (U) Prior to the news of the torture scandal, post had arranged several prominent media spots for the Charge to mark International Roma Day. He appeared on April 8 on TV Markiza discussing the U.S. experience with the "separate but equal" doctrine, and connected that to the separate and inferior conditions of Slovakia's Roma community. Post also placed an op-ed in leading daily SME with the same theme (e-mailed to EUR/CE). PolOffs attended Roma Day events sponsored by the Plenipotentiary's Office and the NGO community.

¶7. (U) COMMENT: We do not yet know if SME held the story to run on International Roma Day, but it certainly presents a stark contrast to the pre-planned celebrations which the Roma community and the Slovak Government have organized. Given the increasingly tense relations between the Fico Administration and the press (septel), we will follow closely the government's response to Sme's reporting. While PM Fico may be tempted to portray it as another attempt to tar the government, the incident is so grave that he will need to tread carefully. Post will monitor the government's investigation of this deeply troubling human rights abuse very closely, while continuing our long-standing engagement with, and outreach to, Slovakia's marginalized Roma community. End Comment.  
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